

2003 - A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

BWT Review

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum

Witham Amateur Operatic Society

Witham Public Hall

April 28 to May 3 2003

Laughing (and singing) all the way to the forum

If you did not see this show at the Public Hall last week, you missed a treat. It is unusual to hear members of the audience raving about individual performances, but the leading players of Witham Amateur Operatic Society thoroughly deserved all the praise.

This musical is a comedy set in ancient Rome and is really funny. The production, directed and choreographed by Elisabeth Ladd, was polished, with the movement around the stage slick and precise. The chorus numbers were particularly effective. The stage was used to the full by a simple set and versatile use of a stone bench. The scenes were enhanced by excellent lighting.

The situations were ludicrous but the temptation to overplay the innuendo and slapstick elements was resisted.

The action depended for its pace on Stewart Adkins as the slave Pseudolus. His energy and confident, uninhibited playing carried the show along with gusto. He was ably complemented by Tim Clarke, who let himself be manipulated into a variety of unlikely situations, which showed that the slaves really held the power.

The plot turned on the beauty of Philia, a courtesan, played by Carolyn Wash. Her romantic interludes with Jonathan Baron, playing Hero, were playful and tuneful. Nicholas Clough showed his usual impeccable timing as Hero's father who sought to sow his last wild oat. He was constantly frustrated by his wife, played by Anne Wilson. They exploited the friction in their relationship to full effect.

The society rose to the challenge of dressing the cast in a wide assortment of wonderful outfits, ranging from authentic-looking Roman military uniforms to the diaphanous costumes of the courtesans, whose dancing was effectively seductive. Brian Lovell, as the Roman officer, was emphatically authoritarian in both his presence and his voice. His attendant trio provided a 'lot of laughs.

Although Stephen Sondheim's music is rarely simple, the cast sang with confidence and their words were always audible, well supported by the orchestra. David Cawdell, the

musical director, did not take the applause he richly deserved.

The excellent writing and the delivery by all the members of the energetic cast made the evening splendidly entertaining. This slick, polished, tuneful performance will be a standard by which to judge future shows.

JAMES BRIGHT

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